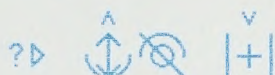




COMMUNICATING Together

Why - Communicating Together?



by Shirley McNaughton

Shirley McNaughton has been associated with Blissymbols and Augmentative Communication since 1971. Throughout the years since she was the special education teacher on the original team that applied Blissymbols with non-speaking children, to her current responsibilities as Executive Director, Blissymbolics Communication Institute, she has maintained a strong service interest and a commitment to the needs of non-speaking people.

I am proud and pleased to introduce the newest publication of the Blissymbolics Communication Institute, *Communicating Together*, a quarterly magazine replacing all former subscription publications, and created to support and to provide Augmentative Communication.

Over the last decade, a new way of helping disabled people has emerged. For those who are unable to speak, non-speech systems have been developed and are being used with increasing success. It can now be said with confidence, "There is no non-speaking person for whom some communication support system cannot be found."

Those of us who have been part of the early years of helping non-speaking people communicate have watched the first tentative efforts of a few expand into a myriad of programs around the world. We have

seen miraculous changes in the lives of countless disabled persons; we have witnessed the establishment of a body of augmentative communication literature and the growing involvement of researchers; we have worked within a multi-professional group, an essential component in the development of this new field; we have been part of the exciting experience of beginning a new discipline which can help mankind.

We who have shared in this creation have learned much as we've gone along. We have acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes as we have interacted with non-speaking people, their families and those who work with them; we are comfortably surrounded with our resource publications and our information links to the developing technologies.



A communication gap

More and more we see a growing communication gap: few in the speaking community know about the needs, the potential, the dreams of those who cannot speak. As non-speaking people develop new ways of communicating, they more and more need to be part of the community — to be helped by it and to contribute to it.

Let us consider two situations: first, a crowded social gathering in a

room through which a blind man is groping his way without benefit of a white cane, a seeing-eye dog or any other type of aid; second, the same setting, and a non-speaking man with no augmentative communication system is trying to be part of the social interaction.

In both situations, the presence of a person with a physical limitation would arouse a variety of emotions: some would feel compassion, others, uneasiness or fear; some would attempt to help, others would withdraw.

In the case of the blind man, a question would probably pass through nearly everyone's mind: how has this person missed what is so readily available for people with this disability? In the second situation, however, one would expect this question to be asked by only a few, and the disability treated as unfortunate but with no thought that assistance was possible (though some might try to guess what the person wished to say — the Twenty Questions game!). Worse still, some people would believe the inability to speak meant the inability to form ideas and questions, and that the non-speaking person had nothing to say.

Many members of the community have come to accept the use of the white cane to help the blind, the hearing aid to help the hearing impaired and wheelchairs to help the physically disabled. Yet, the aids

available for non-speaking persons are largely unknown. Even the term Augmentative Communication would be new to many.



Community Knowledge

This publication will help to bridge the communication gap, and to broaden community awareness of the non-speaking person's needs and the way these needs can be met. Through *Communicating Together*, the activities, ideas, accomplishments, problems and concerns of non-speaking people will be presented, along with information about current aids, resources, research and development. Both non-speaking people and those who interact with them will have an opportunity to learn more about what is available now and what to expect in the future.

And, of course, we will also teach our readers more about Blissymbolics. As we see Blissymbolics providing a basic communication system for a widening group of non-reading, non-speaking people, we realize the need to teach those in the community about this internationally used system.



We're excited!

The Blissymbolics Communication Institute is very excited about this new venture. Not only will *Communicating Together* give us the opportunity to teach and to share our experiences about Blissymbols, but we will have the opportunity to broaden our focus to many forms of Augmentative Communication.

We know well the value of augmentative communication systems in day-to-day functioning. Within the Institute's offices we have the satisfaction of regular involvement with a variety of graphic and technical systems, such as Blissymbol boards, handwritten messages, the Sharp Memowriter, the Autocom and the Apple personal computer.

Through *Communicating Together*, we can do what we have always believed. Our support of the Institute's primary objective — to facilitate the world-wide use of Blissymbolics as an augmentative communication system — has always been within the broader framework of helping the communication of non-speaking people. Now, our recognition that Blissymbolics is but one way (albeit a very powerful one) to assist the non-speaking per-

son, can be demonstrated. Our ultimate goal — as always — is the best possible communication for each non-speaking individual.

And who will communicate together through our magazine? We hope the Blissymbolics Communication Institute will communicate with a growing number of readers; that the users of different systems will communicate with each other through our pages; that more speaking people will communicate with non-speaking people; that non-speaking people with different language and cultural backgrounds will communicate with each other. Through the knowledge and understanding *Communicating Together* can help foster, we look to a future of community awareness, encouragement, support and acceptance — for non-speaking people and the systems they use.

Recently I heard a young and innovative theatre group's rationale for speaking out. Their inspiration came from a simply expressed belief: "What is not said does not exist." We who know those who cannot speak can be challenged by these words in a special way. We can speak, and we can help them "speak" in many ways. We can make their non-uttered thoughts exist. And in so doing, we can give non-speaking people a voice — and an existence. □

Communicating Together.

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